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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001652

SIPDIS

FOR SA/INS AND INL, NEW DELHI FOR DEA

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TAGS: SNAR PGOV PTER CE MV

SUBJECT: Counternarcotics update: Heroin shipments on the downswing; GSL to provide assistance to the Maldives

Refs: (A) Chennai 710

- (B) Colombo 1082

(U) Classified by W. Lewis Amselem, Charge d'Affaires.
Reasons 1.5 (b,d).

¶1. (C) Summary: This Counternarcotics update reviews: Sri Lanka's Police Narcotics Bureau (PNB) reports that heroin shipments to Sri Lanka have been dramatically reduced of late. The PNB attributes this positive trend to three factors: (1) The recent success of Indian authorities in interdiction; (2) indications that the Tamil Tigers may be acting to prevent such shipments; and (3) increased cooperation between the PNB and other police bureaus. In other news indicative of an increased focus on regional approaches on how to deal with the drug problem, the GSL has announced that it is providing the Maldivian government drug interdiction training. End Summary.

Decline in Heroin Shipments

¶2. (SBU) The first item in this Counternarcotics update involves reports that heroin shipments to Sri Lanka are on the downswing. Elaborating on this positive news, the Director of the Police Narcotics Bureau (PNB) Senior Superintendent Pujith Jayasundara told us that the PNB has evidence that heroin shipments into Sri Lanka have been dramatically reduced in the past few months. He sited a number of reasons for the decline, including the recent success of Indian authorities in interdiction. Recent seizures by Indian authorities have included that of 27KG and 32KG heroin shipments -- see Ref A. Based on this record of seizures, the PNB believes that Indian police are taking drug trafficking using Sri Lanka as a nexus with increased seriousness.

¶3. (C) Another apparent factor in the downswing in heroin shipments is the reported crackdown by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) on drug trafficking. Jayasundara told us that the PNB is receiving credible information that the LTTE is intercepting narcotics traffickers and incarcerating them. This information contradicted previous reports that the LTTE gained some of its income via narcotics smuggling, he noted. Jayasundara added that press reports stating that the LTTE recently seized 40KG of heroin could not be confirmed, but there were indications that the reports were accurate.

¶4. (SBU) Commenting on another possible factor in the downswing, Jayasundara was very complimentary of what appeared to an increase in cooperation by local police offices in hampering narcotic sales. Although there had not been large seizures of narcotics in the operations carried out with local offices of late, he noted that a large number of dealers have been arrested and remain in custody thanks to increased GSL coordination. Those in custody included some suspected of being major suppliers of narcotics. The PNB also believes that it is becoming increasingly difficult for traffickers to travel to Sri Lanka by sea because the navy is now able to focus more on such activities than in the recent past because of the ceasefire with the LTTE.

Program with Maldives

¶5. (SBU) In other news, the PNB has announced an upcoming training program with the Maldives meant to assist narcotics interdiction at the international airport serving the Maldivian capital city, Male. On September 23, the PNB will begin training 12 Maldivian officers to do narcotics screening at the Male International Airport. As part of the program, the PNB will also be providing training using sniffer dogs. The GSL will provide two dogs for the Maldivians to use at the end of the training.

Comment

¶6. (C) The news concerning heroin shipments is certainly positive. During the last two months, the PNB has

appeared to be very active, with regular reports of arrests and seizures. Despite the overall seizure rate being down from this year compared to last year (from January through July 61KG of heroin have been seized in 2002 compared to 102KG in 2001), all indications are that heroin supplies in Sri Lanka have been dramatically reduced. The PNB believes the same holds true for narcotics being transshipped through Sri Lanka, which is also good news, as is the apparent crackdown by the LTTE. Finally, the fact that Sri Lanka and the Maldives are cooperating on counternarcotics training is a constructive development, indicative of an increased focus on regional approaches on how to deal with the drug problem. End Comment.

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